



Education Committee

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Public Hearing

Testimony

By

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Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on Proposed Bill 1000, *An Act Concerning the Establishment of An Academically Gifted Advancement Program*, which will permit students to test-out of grade 12 and enroll in certain Connecticut colleges and universities.

My name is Dr. E. Jean Gubbins. I am a Professor in Residence in the Department of Educational Psychology at the Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut, and an expert in gifted education and talent development. This testimony represents the collective views of Dr. Joseph Renzulli, Dr. Sally M. Reis, Dr. Del Siegle, and Dr. Catherine Little. We commend the members of the Connecticut Legislature who have proposed this bill as the advancement of Connecticut's gifted and talented students is of utmost importance.

We recognize that within our Connecticut high schools there are students who have the talents and abilities to enter college prior to their typical graduation year. In fact, there are early entrants to Connecticut colleges and universities who have not received their high school diplomas, and they are currently enrolled in classes with typical, college age students. Their advanced achievement and skills are recognized; however, their performance on tests alone may not have been the best indicators of success in college, as tests predict test scores rather than productivity and future accomplishments in chosen careers. Successful early entrants demonstrate the depth and breadth of content knowledge, the self-motivation, and the emotional maturity to continue achieving at high levels.

It is important to consider the research on early entrants to colleges and universities. In *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, Brody, Muratori, Stanley, and Stanley (2004) summarized the research on groups of early entrants to college. They found that the research "strongly suggests that many were highly successful academically without

experiencing concomitant social or emotional difficulties. On the other hand, there is also evidence that some individual students who entered college at younger-than-typical ages have had difficulty adjusting and failed to achieve at the level one might have expected” (p. 105). It is also important to acknowledge that Southern, Jones, and Stanley (1993) cautioned us to remember that entrance to college is not a timed race, as college is a major step in preparing for adulthood and chosen professions.

An Act Concerning the Establishment of An Academically Gifted Advancement Program avoids potential issues that some early entrants have experienced by limiting the early college pathway to grade 11 students and recognizes that the talents and gifts of high performing Connecticut students must be addressed by offering more challenging educational opportunities. Given that students in any one grade may vary in age, entering college one year early should not present barriers to success. However, a passing score may not be sufficient information about future performance in college, as college admissions officers typically require multiple data sources that may include grade point average, results of Advanced Placement examinations, teacher recommendations, written essays, SAT, ACT scores, and other evidence of students’ academic success (e.g., extracurricular commitments, evidence of leadership). Tying the criterion of a passing exam score to a scholarship to a public or private institution is an incredible incentive for students who are ready and able to begin their college experience. However, we would be remiss if we did not reflect on the potential issues that this bill, as currently written, must address now or in regulations and guidelines.

- The Connecticut State Board of Education should offer information on the number of students that represent the highest levels of performance on the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) or comparable exam. Connecticut has several students who are semi-finalists or finalists for the National Merit Scholarship, and the typical test requirements for this prestigious award recognize students who perform at the 99th percentile on the PSAT on critical reading, mathematics, and writing. From a fiscal perspective, how many students would actually qualify for the program based on test scores alone?
- We recommend that multiple criteria be established for participation in this academically gifted advancement program. The legislature should collaborate with the State Board of Education to create specific guidelines for participation in this program and to outline an award process that stipulates how award decisions would be determined and implemented.
- Guidelines should be established for participating colleges and universities that accept students who have met the pre-established criteria. Colleges and universities participating in the program should be encouraged to create a longitudinal database of the early entrants to determine the extent to which the program is effective for the students. In fact, it may be prudent to establish a research fund for such purposes.
- The academically gifted advancement program must be responsive to the talents and gifts of students from all over Connecticut. As stated in the *National Excellence Report: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* (1993), “Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of

human endeavor” (p. 26). The legislation cannot become another financial resource for academically gifted students whose families have the means to support their children in college. We must support students from economically disadvantaged environments.

We appreciate the support of the legislators for acknowledging that the needs of gifted and talented students should be met at all levels. The rationale for the academically gifted advancement program is sound as it recognizes that not all students must meet the requirements for “seat time” in high school before they assume new academic challenges with their academic peers on the campuses of Connecticut’s colleges and universities. Currently, many high school students have options of enrolling in college courses while in high school through Advanced Placements, the University of Connecticut Early College Experiences, or online courses. However, it is time to seriously consider recognizing the talents and gifts of our top students who are ready to engage in their next academic challenge.